

Subject: ERRC Press Release: Police Abuse in Greece

Date: Tue, 20 Nov 2001 13:36:20 +0100

From: European Roma Rights Center <errc@errc.org>

To: errc@errc.org

On November 19, 2001, the ERRC sent a letter to Greek Minister of Justice Mr Philipos Petsalnikos to express concern at the killing by police officers of a 21-year-old Romani man named Marinos Christopoulos in Zefyri, in the Attica region of Greece. In its letter, the ERRC calls upon Minister Petsalnikos to ensure that a thorough and impartial investigation is carried out into the shooting death of Mr Christopoulos; that any and all persons guilty of crimes in connection with this case are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law; and that any and all harmed parties receive due just remedy, including all relevant damages. Insofar as the killing of Mr Christopoulos, and the issue of police abuse of Roma in Greece more broadly, are issues of deep public concern, the ERRC further urges that justice in this case comprise a public component such as, for example:

- explicit recognition by high ranking Greek officials that police abuse of Roma is a serious problem in Greece;
- comprehensive public review of policing issues as they relate to the Romani community;
- and possibly a plan of action to combat police abuse of Roma.

Information on the situation of Roma in Greece is available on the Internet at: <http://errc.org/publications/indices/greece.shtml>. The text of the ERRC letter to Minister Petsalnikos follows below. For the purposes of this press release, the ERRC has altered the text of the letter to conceal the identity of the alleged perpetrator. His full name is however provided in the ERRC letter.

Honourable Mr Petsalnikos,

The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), an international public interest law organisation which monitors the human rights situation of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse, is concerned about the reported killing of a Romani man by a police officer in Greece.

The ERRC has received information that on October 24, 2001, at approximately 10 PM, a 21-year-old Romani man named Marinos Christopoulos was shot dead by Emergency Squad Police Officer G.T. in Zefyri, in the region of Attica, during a routine police check. According to a press release issued on October 25, 2001, by the General Police Directorate of Attica, Mr Christopoulos was fatally wounded when he refused to pull over

at a road block and, according to police, allegedly accelerated his car in the direction of the three officers at the scene. According to the police press release, Officer G.T. fired a gunshot which struck the upper left side of the windshield once, on the driver's side of the vehicle driven by Mr Christopoulos. After the shot was fired, Mr Christopoulos's vehicle crashed into a hydroelectric pole. Mr Christopoulos reportedly died at the scene of the shooting.

The Greek Helsinki Monitor, an ERRC partner organisation in Greece has, however, received information that according to a forensic medical report on the victim, the fatal shot was to the back of the victim's head, and therefore could not have entered through the front windshield. This points to the possibility that Officer G.T. used his firearm after the car driven by Mr Christopoulos had passed the police officers. Indeed, it appears that Greek police investigators may share this opinion, as Officer G.T. has reportedly been charged with homicide in connection with the incident.

The ERRC notes that the abusive use of force resulting in death contravenes Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which guarantee the right to life. In the killing of Mr Christopoulos, Officer G.T. may have additionally acted outside the boundaries set by the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which state that "law enforcement officials shall not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury [...]." Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights, further states: "Everyone whose rights and freedoms as set forth in this Convention are violated shall have an effective remedy before a national authority notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity."

Honourable Mr Philipos Petsalnikos, the ERRC commends Greek authorities for charging Emergency Squad Police Officer G.T. in connection with the fatal shooting of Mr Marinos Christopoulos. The ERRC calls upon your office to ensure that a thorough and impartial investigation is carried out into the shooting death of Mr Marinos Christopoulos; that any and all persons guilty of crimes in connection with this case are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law; and that any and all harmed parties receive due just remedy, including all relevant damages. Insofar as the killing of Mr Christopoulos, and the issue of police abuse of Roma in Greece more broadly, are issues of deep public concern, the ERRC further urges that justice in this case comprise a public component such as, for example:

- explicit recognition by high ranking Greek officials that police abuse of Roma is a serious problem in Greece;
- comprehensive public review of policing issues as they relate to the Romani community;
- and possibly a plan of action to combat police abuse of Roma.

We respectfully request to be informed of the results of any actions taken by your office in connection to this case.

Sincerely,
Dimitrina Petrova
Executive Director

Persons wishing to express similar concerns are urged to contact:

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The European Roma Rights Center is an international public interest law organisation which monitors the rights of Roma and provides legal defence in cases of human rights abuse. For more information about the European Roma Rights Center, visit the ERRC on the web at <http://www.errc.org>.

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